

Fat politics. The real story behind America's obesity epidemic

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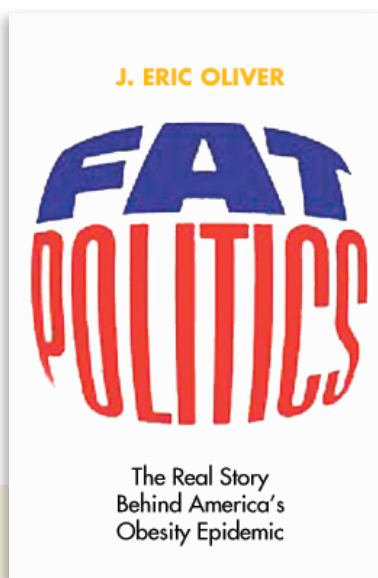
PUBLISHED 2006/240 pp/\$19.95

OVERALL RATING Very good

STRENGTHS Identifies the economic and social forces driving the propagation of an obesity epidemic myth in spite of evidence suggesting that body weight, per se, is not a major predictor or indicator of the disease

WEAKNESSES Fails to consider that material living conditions are the primary determinants of both disease and excessive weight among marginalized social groups

AUDIENCE Family physicians, public health professionals, and policy makers



The International Association for the Study of Obesity and the American Obesity Association among others are funded by drug companies, and members are usually supported by these same companies. Weight-setting and obesity task forces are staffed by drug industry-funded "obesity experts." Public health agencies willingly board the obesity carousel and collect the funding ring.

Negative attitudes toward overweight people contribute to the obesity epidemic. More than half of the public are stigmatized as suffering from the disease of overweight, and there are costs

associated with dangerous diet pills and faulty surgeries.

The author's primary fault is neglecting the role that living conditions play in excess disease and weight; excess weight—and poor health—is especially common among poor people and people of colour in the United States. Considering how the obesity epidemic has gained traction in Canada while continuing high poverty rates are ignored, this book is important reading.

—Dennis Raphael PhD

Dr Raphael is a Professor of Health Policy and Management at York University in Toronto, Ont.

Child's play. Rediscovering the joy of play in our families and communities

AUTHOR Silken Laumann

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PUBLISHED 2006/320 pp/\$17.95

OVERALL RATING Good

STRENGTHS Thought-provoking; inspiring; easy to read

The author's initial consideration of the reasons for Americans' weight gain and their health implications led him to discover that the scanty evidence supporting this association was contradictory. He argues, therefore, that the driving force behind the "obesity epidemic" is the quest for profits by the weight-loss and pharmaceutical industries, aided by researchers and public health officials cashing in on money being provided by governments and funding agencies. Negative attitudes toward overweight people held by the public, including health care professionals, facilitate this process.

Initially, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that excess weight caused 400 000 extra deaths annually among Americans, but later estimates were fewer than 26 000. Actually, being slightly overweight—rather than normal weight—predicted better adult health. Other studies simply compared health status of obese people to others, ignoring confounding factors. Some simply attributed all costs of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease to excess weight.